

# Historiography and the Remaking of North Korea's Ideology in the Age of Globalization: *Interpreting the Revised Edition of Ryeoksa sajeon* \*

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## Abstract

*This paper intends to reappraise the relationship between historiography and politics in North Korea by analyzing the revised edition of Ryeoksa sajeon (Dictionary of History). Published almost 30 years after its initial publication in 1971, the new edition embodies how desperately and earnestly North Korea has struggled to remake its own imagery and national identity in order to cope with a series of crisis after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994. Are the two core ideologies penetrating the first edition—socialism founded on Marxism-Leninism and strong antipathy to U.S. imperialism—still unconditionally respected in the revised edition? Does the appearance of the revised edition indicate an important ideological transformation taking place among the ruling elite of North Korea? And, would rewriting history guarantee a safer and more promising future for the North Korean people in the age of globalization? These are questions that the author raises and attempts to answer.*

**Keywords:** North Korea, *Ryeoksa sajeon*, historiography, Kim Jung Il, globalization/homogeneification

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### After Kim Il Sung's Death: "What Is To Be Done?"

Writing or rather rewriting history is equivalent to making an ideological statement beyond an academic dimension.<sup>1</sup> In particular, (re)classification and (re)definition of an overall historical knowledge are a serious official business for any nation to (re)make its own imagery and identity. The arrival of a revised edition of the *Ryeoksa sajeon* (Dictionary of History)—which, hereafter, will be abbreviated as *Dictionary*—in 1999-2004,<sup>2</sup> almost 30 years after its initial publication in 1971,<sup>3</sup> in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter, North Korea) is such a case. Most North Korean historians devote themselves to becoming revolutionaries by contributing to the reinforcement and propagation of the core national ideology that is beneficial to the working class and people in general.<sup>4</sup> What kinds of politico-economic crises and diplomatic upheavals, then, had prompted North Korean historians to rewrite the *Dictionary* as a project to reformulate North Korea's national memory and identity? Does the appearance of the revised edition hint at an important ideological shift taking place in North Korea? The purpose of this paper is to shed light on these fundamental questions concerning the relationship between historiography and power politics in North Korea.

Since the publication of the *Dictionary's* first edition, North Korea has faced critical challenges both internally and externally. When the president of the Republic of Korea (hereafter, South Korea), Park Chung-hee was assassinated, it disturbed the relation-

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1. With this statement, I obviously have Michel Foucault's conception of "discourse" in mind. See Foucault (1980).

2. Sahoe Gwahakwon (Academy of Social Sciences), Yeoksa Yeonguso (History Research Institute), ed. *Ryeoksa sajeon* (Dictionary of History), 6 vols. (Pyongyang: Gwahak Baekkwa Sajeon Jonghap Chulpansa, 1999-2004). Hereafter, abbreviated as *Dictionary*, rev. ed.

3. Sahoe Gwahakwon (Academy of Social Sciences), Yeoksa Yeonguso (History Research Institute), ed. *Ryeoksa sajeon* (Dictionary of History), 2 vols. (Pyongyang: Sahoegwahak Chulpansa, 1971). Hereafter, abbreviated as *Dictionary*, 1st ed.

4. For the historical philosophy shared by most North Korean historians, see Yook (2007, 496).

ship of “hostile coexistence” on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> To make matters worse, the previous bilateral world system came to an end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Both South and North Korea had to realign with surrounding great powers in order to avoid being “the helpless shrimp among whales.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, North Korea suffered economically and militarily from the loss of its closest allies including the USSR. Most of all, the death of “the great beloved leader” Kim Il Sung in 1994 drove the ruling class and the people of North Korea into a great panic. In short, for North Koreans, the fin de siècle twentieth century was a period of unprecedented ordeals and upheavals; the shining promise of socialism transformed into a dead dog; the “sun of the nation” who was the virtuous father of the North Korean people had disappeared into posterity for good; the wave of globalization masterminded by the United States was high and wild.

In the midst of these chaotic and antagonistic circumstances, various socialist organizations from across the globe gathered in 1993 in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, and jointly proclaimed that they would recuperate and uphold socialist ideology. The so-called “Pyongyang Declaration” concluded that “the building of socialism failed in some countries, because they did not establish a social structure favorable to the fundamental needs of the people” and stressed that “the way to socialism is an unknown one; on its march there would inevitably be obstacles.” Therefore, the dissolution of some socialist countries, it emphasized, did not necessarily mean the end of the socialist experiment and the victory of capitalism. The Pyongyang Declaration was confident that the ultimate triumph of socialism over capitalism whose mantra is “money determines everything” would depend upon “the people who have been united and have

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5. For the definition and mechanism of the relationships of hostile coexistence, which contributes to helping rival nations/ideologies survive side by side, see Lim (2005).

6. For the most recent and comprehensive study on how two Koreas have readjusted themselves in their new relations with China, Japan, Russia, and the United States during the 1990s and beyond, see S. Kim (2006).

struggled for socialism.”<sup>7</sup>

While the purpose of the Pyongyang Declaration was to advocate a *raison d'être* of socialism after the demise of the Soviet Union, Kim Jong Il's manifesto, "Socialism is a science," sought the internal and spiritual rearmament of the North Korean regime after the death of Kim Il Sung. In an essay published in *Rodong Sinmun* on November 1, 1994, "the Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il insisted that "though socialism has collapsed in many countries, socialism as a science is still alive in the people's heart" (J. Kim 1995, 49). This survival owes, without a doubt, to Kim Il Sung who "provided a scientific explanation of the essence of human beings for the first time in history" by discovering the essential property that "men are social beings who have independence, creativity, and consciousness." Referring to his father's Juche ideology, the faithful Kim Jung Il reminded North Korean people in sorrow that "the philosophical principle that man is the master of everything and determines all things" consolidated socialism upon a permanent scientific foundation. Kim Jung Il assured that "the most scientific, superior, and powerful socialism, that is, human-oriented socialism, or people-centered socialism" will surely prevail even after the death of its founder (J. Kim 1995, 63).

Considering that the (re)compilation of a dictionary usually takes three to four years of preparation, it seems that the revised edition was initiated around 1995. Thus, it may be inferred that the principles expressed in the Pyongyang Declaration and Kim Jung Il's manifesto function as the basic ideological compass for the revised *Dictionary*. North Korean leaders may have realized that it is necessary to amend the fallacy of their own past in order to avoid the same fate of the European socialist countries. Chronic deficiencies in food and increasing numbers of defectors since the early 1990s were other symptoms of their regime's undeniable malaise. Standing at the edge of a precipice, the ruling elite had to revise its own official history as

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7. "Let's Advocate and Advance the Achievement of Socialism: Pyongyang Declaration," in KCNA (1993, 715-716). All English translations of North Korean sources appearing in this paper are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

a means of coming to terms with the changed circumstances.

Conducting a multi-year project on the rewriting of the past, North Korean leaders must have contemplated the same question that Lenin had on the eve of the Russian Revolution—"what is to be done?" (Lenin 1969). Are the foundational ideologies such as historical materialism, anti-(U.S.) imperialism, and Juche ideology still viable enough to guarantee the survival of North Korea? Or, in order to keep pace with the U.S.-dominated age of globalization, does North Korea need to readjust or reexamine its own ideological fundamentals? By modifying and/or rectifying its own unfortunate history as carved in the first edition, can North Korea anticipate a safer and happier future? While very carefully reading the revised version of the *Dictionary*, we may come up with insightful clues to these existential questions.

Academic indifference outside of North Korea to the *Dictionary of History* reflects the ideological bias engrained in existing North Korean Studies. Many experts on North Korea are still trapped in ungrounded prejudices and foregone conclusions that academic works orchestrated by North Korean authorities are nothing but propaganda trash, undeserving of serious scholarly research. Obstructed by such political/ideological blinders, these experts tended to approach North Korea as a problem to be dealt with or to be resolved, instead of trying to properly understand what North Korea really is. This unfortunate state of mind shared by many specialists explains why there have been very few studies that analyzed the first edition of *Dictionary of History* and none on the revised edition (Kwon 1990; Yook 2008).

It is paradoxical to note that as far as North Korea is concerned, its official publications are the only *reliable* and available sources that allow us to take an inside look at the world of the "Hermit Kingdom of the neo-Confucian socialist country." We have to keep in mind that all published materials that are rigidly supervised by North Korean bureaucrats offer us an indispensable barometer by which we can keep trace of and gauge any significant changes occurring in its ideological, diplomatic, politico-economical, and sociocultural poli-

cies. It is my wish that this case study would help us to approach more closely the *mentalité* of the North Korean people, and stimulate other case studies based on the *Dictionary of History*, which look at North Korea without preconceptions.

### **The Evolution of *Dictionary of History*: An External Analysis**

I was not able to unearth any document that explicitly states why exactly the North Korean authority decided to revise the 30-year-old *Dictionary*. We may guess by deciphering casual and fragmented comments. The preface of the revised edition states: “great international incidents”<sup>8</sup> have occurred during the last 30 years (1971-1999) and “significant achievements in world history have been accomplished.”<sup>9</sup> And *Ryeoksa gwahak* (Historical Science), the oldest journal of historical studies in North Korea, took the unusual step of printing a notice for the revised edition: “in the struggle for the autonomy of the world and for the reconstruction of socialism, progress has been made . . . these facts compelled us to supplement and amend the outdated first edition of *Dictionary of History*.”<sup>10</sup>

When we examine these commentaries together, it appears that the major objective of the revised edition was twofold: 1) to protect and secure North Korea’s regime by reinforcing the essential values of socialism in the post-Soviet Union era, and 2) to re-educate and mobilize the North Korean populace by enlightening them with “proper and updated [historical] knowledge.” The targeted audience thus includes both ruling members who are too opportunistic and disloyal to comply with the *ancien régime* and common people who are possibly spoiled by their experiments with a capitalistic market system. Since the early 1990s, open local produce markets have gradually emerged to compensate for the ill-functioning state rationing

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8. These are presumed to refer to the collapse of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

9. See Preface to *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 1.

10. *Ryeoksa gwahak* 174 (2000): p. 65.

system. After the DPRK initiated a series of economic reforms in 2002 known as Economic Management Improvement Measures (EMIM; *gyeongje gwalli gaeseon jochi*), private economic autonomy and private consumerism—to a limited extent—spread among the North Korean people.<sup>11</sup> The revised edition of *Dictionary of History* was thus devised to reawaken the revolutionary spirit of these possibly sluggish people so that North Korean regime could survive in the age of globalization and neoliberalism, which is hostile to Communist nations.

To achieve these goals, the revised edition contains significantly different features from the previous edition in terms of world view and historiography. First of all, in contrast to the two-volume first edition, the revised edition was extended to a total of six volumes. Volumes 1 and 2 address Korean history from ancient to modern times, volumes 3 and 4 handle contemporary Korean history, and volumes 5 and 6 cover world history. Among six volumes total, four volumes have been reserved exclusively for Korean history; thus, priority is given to Korean history as was the case with the first edition. However, it is worth noting that unlike the first edition, world history has been organized into separate volumes. Furthermore, the revised edition has a total of 2,109 pages, which is less than the 2,422 pages of the first edition. In spite of its quantitative condensation, the number of total items is 7,752, which is twice the 3,402 items in the first edition. In addition, while the two volumes of the first edition were published simultaneously, each volume of the revised edition was published at five-year intervals. This suggests that its editors had invested considerable effort in supplementing and polishing the earlier version.

Let us turn to further statistical dissection. In the revised edition, items related to Korean history doubled compared to the first edition, whereas those related to world history more than quadrupled. While the first edition had 2,910 (85.5%) items related to Korean history

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11. Some scholars compare the EMIM with the New Economic Policy (NEP) adapted by Lenin after the Bolshevik Revolution. See Oh and Hassig (2009, 75).

and 492 (14.5%) items to world history, there are 5,726 (73.9%) items for Korean history and 2,026 (26.1%) items for world history in the revised edition. Overall, while Korean history decreased approximately by 10%, world history increased by approximately the same amount. To break it down in greater detail, 265 items of Western history (7.8%), 173 items of Asian history (5.1%) and 54 items of comparative history (1.6%) were published in the first edition; the revised edition includes 1,010 items of Western history (13.0%), 705 items of Asian history (9.0%), and 240 items of comparative history (3.0%). The proportion of Western and Asian histories increased approximately twofold from the first to the revised edition. In particular, a remarkable increase in the number of items related to American history within the Western history section indicates special attention had been given to the United States, which had been described

*Table 1. Comparison between the First and Revised Editions of Dictionary of History*

	The First Edition of <i>Dictionary of History</i>	The Revised Edition of <i>Dictionary of History</i>	Comparative Remark
Total Pages	2,422 pages	2,109 pages	313 pages
Total Items	3,402 items	7,752 items	4,350 items ↓
Korean History Items (Ratio to the total)	2,910 items (85.5%)	5,726 items (73.9%)	2,816 items ↑ (11.6% ↓)
World History Items (Ratio to the total)	492 items (14.5%)	2,026 items (26.1%)	1,534 items ↑ (11.6% ↑)
Asian History Items (Ratios to the total/ world history)	173 items (5.1%/35.2%)	705 items (9.0%)	532 items ↑ (3.9% ↑)
Western History Items (Ratios to the total/ world history)	265 items (7.8%/53.9%)	1,010 items (13.0%)	745 items ↑ (5.2% ↑)
U.S.-Related Items (Ratio to the total)	29 items (0.85%)	70 items (0.90%)	41 items ↑ (0.05%)

as the “mortal enemy of the Korean people” in the first edition.

Other than the quantitative changes in the *Dictionary*, changes in style and editorial manner cannot be overlooked. The fact that there is an increase in published items despite a decrease in the total number of pages shows that the revised edition generally abstained from harsh and emotional expressions whenever possible and employed more refined and moderate descriptive styles. And whereas the first edition was published under the organizational name, the revised edition disclosed the names of scholars who had participated in the compilation of the work. It provided the names of experts who performed the editorial supervision of each volume, and the last page of volume 6 listed 61 persons affiliated with Kim Il Sung University, Kim Hyung Jik University of Education, and Joseon Central History Museum. When contrasted with the collective workmanship commonly practiced until the 1980s, the identification of individual scholars is surely noteworthy. Then, does the publication of the revised edition indicate that historical science in North Korea evolved into a new era of advancement, having passed through earlier stages of the formative period (1956-1970) and stabilization period (1971-1994)?<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand how far the revised edition departed in terms of historiography from the first *Dictionary*, I will confine myself to examining volumes 5 and 6, and focus exclusively on the items related to Western history. My subsequent arguments will revolve around three questions. First, is socialism founded on historical materialism—the core ideology penetrating the first edition—still unconditionally followed in the revised edition? Our attempt to answer this question will reveal how North Korea's ruling class changed its perception of the surrounding world after the collapse of socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the death of Kim Il Sung. Second, is the strong anti-U.S. imperialism that permeated first edition repeated or reduced in the revised edition? This inquiry will help us predict whether North Korea under Kim Jung Il's leadership would be willing

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12. Regarding the controversy over the proper periodization of North Korea's historical writings, see Yook (2008, 632-633).

to compromise and negotiate with the United States to join the new world system. Third, how can we evaluate the revised edition as a monumental piece of work born in the age of globalization? Speculating on the last question, I will approach the first and revised editions of *Dictionary* from global historical perspectives by problematizing them beyond the regional/national boundary of the Korean peninsula. In other words, this paper is not intended to be merely another case study on (North) Korean history and politics per se, but rather a new world history narrated through the prism of the dictionaries.

As for methodology, I employ a comparative point of view in investigating the contents of the first and revised editions, applying the following three categories: 1) what items were published in the first edition but deleted in the revised edition; 2) what items are newly added in the revised edition which had not appeared in the first edition; and 3) how the account of the same item is repeated or altered between the first and revised editions. The omissions and additions of specific items are not a simple matter of general editorial practice. Instead, they convey editors' deliberate intent to persuade readers to remember or forget the past in a specific and strategic way. And the varied depictions of the same event and the shifting portrayals of the same person would illustrate how North Korea had struggled to remake its own national identity and ideology during the last thirty years.

### **“Authentic” Socialism Never Fails**

The shock wave following the fall of European socialist countries can be detected in two ways in the revised edition. First, there is an ambivalent love-hate attitude toward those countries that had once been close allies in the past. For example, the first edition had paid a lengthy (two and a half pages) tribute to the epoch-making significance of the birth of a communist regime in the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> In

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13. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, pp. 1145-1148.

contrast, the revised edition only briefly (a half page) sketches the cause and aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It assigns blame by asserting that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union brought dispute and conflict within the Union by importing the Western parliamentary system along with a plural party system. The party was also responsible for the separation of Ukraine and Kazakhstan from the USSR by urging the shift to a market economy and the recognition of private ownership.<sup>14</sup> A sense of betrayal by Gorbachev who orchestrated Glasnost and Perestroika is evident in the revised edition.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the revised *Dictionary* bitterly criticizes the reunification of Germany. Compared to the exaggerated admiration for the emergence of a German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as “a fundamental turning point in the history of Germany” in the first edition,<sup>16</sup> the revised edition briefly mourns the fall of East Germany. It judges that the “betrayal of Gorbachev and the West German Social Democrats” were responsible for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.<sup>17</sup> And, whereas the first edition reprimanded West Germany for “militarism and fascism under the active protection of U.S. imperialism,”<sup>18</sup> the revised edition recognizes the German Federal Republic (the former West Germany) as the sole legitimate German nation. Leaving all earlier antagonistic rhetoric behind, the revised *Dictionary* records that North Korea and the German Federal Republic agreed to establish a diplomatic relationship in 2001.<sup>19</sup>

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14. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 179.

15. North Korea-Soviet relations deteriorated when Kim Il Sung overtly supported the abortive military revolt in 1991 against Gorbachev. See Buzo (1999, 188, 200). In 1995 Russia, the successor to the USSR, notified North Korea that it would no longer renew its Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance signed in 1961. A new revised treaty in 2000 reportedly does not guarantee Russian military assistance to the DPRK in the event of an attack. See Oh and Hassig (2000, 107).

16. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 525.

17. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 98.

18. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, pp. 96-99.

19. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, pp. 95-96.

In the case of France, a nation previously labeled as “an imperialist nation in Western Europe,” the revised edition sends a friendly gesture by removing the tag of “imperialist” and by omitting the French-Algeria conflict.<sup>20</sup> Updated news has been added regarding the signing of a 1984 agreement between President Mitterrand’s socialist government and North Korea to install a trading delegation between the two countries.<sup>21</sup> As matter of fact, Kim Jung Il had managed to establish diplomatic normalization with thirteen Western European countries by the beginning of the twenty-first century. In a way of setting the stage for and fostering this friendly atmosphere, all expressions of animosity targeting Western nations found in the first edition were erased. The memorable description which demonized Paris, London, and New York as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>22</sup> has disappeared in the revised edition.

On the other hand, the revised edition welcomes the demise of the Soviet Union as a critical moment to reappraise the efficacy of Marxism-Leninism. The announcement that “Marxism-Leninism is no longer an answer to the revolutionary praxis of our times owing to its anachronism and theoretical immaturity” has been added in the section on Marxism-Leninism.<sup>23</sup> This may sound like a shocking confession that the construction and maintenance of the socialist country blindly obedient to Marxism-Leninism would be neither possible nor desirable in the post-USSR era.<sup>24</sup> The elimination of all entries on Communist parties that appeared in the first edition reflects this

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20. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, p. 915.

21. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 201.

22. For instance, see *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 455.

23. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 183.

24. In fact, the disavowal of Marxism-Leninism by the North Korean authority did not come all of a sudden and thus was not shocking at all. When the new constitution was promulgated in 1972, Juche idea was regarded as the overarching ideology of the state, as Article 4 referred to it as “a creative application of Marxism-Leninism to the conditions of our country.” The 1992 Constitution, revised after the downfall of “Soviet-style socialism,” completely dropped the term of Marxism-Leninism, and the superiority of Juche ideology over Marxism-Leninism was reaffirmed. Quoted from Christopher Hale (2002, 296, 298).

painful realization. The revised edition's attempt to rediscover the positive legacy of the early (utopian) socialists may be another sign that shows how desperately the North Korean authority is searching for an alternative path to Marxism-Leninism.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that the harsh criticisms against the fallacy of Marxism-Leninism are accompanied by a strong determination to protect the purity and authenticity of Marxism-Leninism. Consistent attacks on other (pseudo-)socialist factions in competition with Marxism-Leninism reveal this awkward phenomenon. For example, labor unionism/trade unionism is condemned as "rightist ideology which supports the interest of labor aristocrats";<sup>26</sup> Blanquism<sup>27</sup> is branded as a leftist adventurism ideology which wrongly "calculates that political power would be obtained by a few revolutionists through conspiracy and terrorism";<sup>28</sup> Fabian Society is referred to as a "reformist and at the same time reactionary ideology which preaches that the transfer to socialism might be possible in a gradual way";<sup>29</sup> Millerandism<sup>30</sup> or Cabinetism has been condemned as an abominable right-wing socialism which betrays the working class by participating as reactionary bourgeois cabinet members;<sup>31</sup> and syndicalism as "petit-bourgeois opportunistic ideology" is accused of transferring the means of production to the hands of labor unions.<sup>32</sup> The revised edition classifies all sorts of socialist experiments that had challenged Marxism-Leninism as revisionist factions that have to be eliminated.

How can we make sense of the revised edition's contradictory

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25. See items on Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon (*Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, pp. 106, 188).

26. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 132; and vol. 6, p. 93.

27. Named after Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), a French socialist and revolutionary who supported insurrection by trained guerrilla groups.

28. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, pp. 243-244.

29. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 123.

30. Named after Alexander Millerand (1859-1943), a French politician who served as minister of commerce, prime minister, and president of the Third Republic.

31. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 210; and vol. 6, pp. 81-82.

32. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 177.

attitude that tries to safeguard the purity of Marxism-Leninism from other forms of socialism, while simultaneously rejecting the efficiency of Marxism-Leninism in a contemporary world order? It is likely that North Korea has resolved to become a martyr, unafraid to suffer or sacrifice in order to rekindle the Marxist-Leninist ember that had been buried in ashes after the fall of the USSR. After all, North Korean ruling elites never gave up the possibility of resurgence of purer and stronger socialism. The revised edition of *Dictionary* wishfully observes: in the Russian Republic, “left-wing competence has risen rapidly, movements for the revival of socialism have been revitalized, and left-wing powers won the municipal elections.”<sup>33</sup> A similar aspiration is expressed in the item on the Chinese Communist Party: “Regretting its former faults of ‘the leftist errors’ committed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese Communist Party nowadays delightfully reconstructs the nation according to Marxist principles.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the absolute homage and loyalty tendered to socialism’s founders resemble that of neo-Confucian gentlemen, who never betray their Master.<sup>35</sup>

The ambiguous ideological position of Kim Jung Il’s regime is repeated in its view of religion. It has oscillated between the two axes

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33. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 139.

34. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 29. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Red Guards accused Kim Il Sung of being a counter-revolutionary revisionist who had refused to send military aid to Vietnamese communists’ struggle against U.S. imperialism.

35. Kim Jung Il made an official visit to the Russian Republic and other nations formerly part of the former Soviet Union in 2001 and in 2002. The following anecdote illustrates how he humbly situated his ideological position vis-à-vis Lenin: “Our Great General [Kim Jung Il] demonstrated his moral loyalty and revolutionary principles by paying a tribute to Lenin’s tomb. . . . After the collapse of Socialism, Lenin’s tomb has been abandoned and no leaders or heads of socialist parties stopped by the tomb of Lenin. While Yeltsin ruled the Russian Republic, national resolution was even passed to prohibit a visit to Lenin’s tomb. Honor guards around the tomb were withdrawn, and there has been only silence in Red Square. In such a sad and insulting time, the Great General was determined to exhibit his homage to Lenin. He was convinced that by visiting the tomb of the protagonist of the world’s working class, the sublime moral loyalty of real revolutionists would be demonstrated to everyone in the world” (J. Jin 2003, 14).

of passive tolerance and apparent animosity. Unlike the first edition that abided by Marx's teaching that "religion is opium for the people," the revised edition shows a relatively tolerant pose to world religion. This may be seen in the removal of the Vatican entry found in the first edition, which stated that the Vatican "engages in destruction, slander, and espionage activities in opposition to all socialist countries and national independence movements."<sup>36</sup> Feuerbach's core teaching, that is, atheist criticism against Christianity, has been also obliterated from the revised edition.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, the earlier resentment against Buddhism, which was accused of serving the reactionary politics of the ruling class by fabricating and promoting retributive justice and escapism, has also been deleted.<sup>38</sup> Knitting these patchy pieces of evidence together, religious tolerance of the revised edition seems to be not just a temporary and improvised measure, but a part of a grand and long-term ideological readjustment dictated from above. In fact, to demonstrate some semblance of religious freedom, North Korean authority allowed Christian congregations such as the Bongsu Methodist Church and the Jangchun Catholic Church to be built in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Religious flexibility, nonetheless, has a firm threshold that cannot be trespassed. The historical sins committed by Christianity were neither forgotten nor forgiven in the revised edition: "As an instrument of imperialist assault, the Christians who invaded our country in modern times brought about enormous harm and disaster to the lives of Korean people, to social progress, and to national development."<sup>39</sup> The revised edition reminds readers of a number of shameful incidents: when Christianity was legitimized with the signing of Korea-America Treaty in 1882, Presbyterian missionaries "first crept into our country to spread propaganda, thereby to paralyze the Korean people's sense of independence;"<sup>40</sup> the organizations representing

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36. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 854.

37. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 83.

38. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 961.

39. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 76.

40. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, pp. 15-16.

each Christian sect during the Japanese colonial period “decided to pay tribute to the Japanese shrine . . . and actively collaborated with the invasive war of Japanese imperialists.”<sup>41</sup> If religion is not wholesale opium anymore, it is still a poison that is to be tightly restrained and not to be swallowed by ordinary North Koreans.

In summary, with the launch of the revised version of *Dictionary of History*, North Korea declares its special global status as the last and sole authentic socialist nation in a post-USSR era. By challenging the timeless validity of Marxism-Leninism and by superseding it with the putatively more scientific and human-oriented Juche ideology, the revised *Dictionary* swears to readers that the North Korean version of socialism will never cave in and will prevail. The very episteme of “the socialism of our style,” that is, a solipsistic nationalism or Korea-centrism, seems to be successfully inherited from father to son, as Kim Il Sung’s Juche ideology is echoed by Kim Jung Il’s ethnocentric motto of *joseon minjok jeiljuui* (Korea Supremacy Ideology).<sup>42</sup>

### **The United States: From Mortal Enemy to Potential Dialogue Partner?**

Another characteristic that distinguishes the first edition from the revised one is the fluctuating and complicated views vis-à-vis the United States. On the one hand, the revision holds a less antagonistic attitude than before; on the other hand, the anti-U.S. sentiment remains vividly evident. While the first edition proclaimed the United States as “the most barbaric and aggressive imperialist nation today,”<sup>43</sup> the revised edition maintains a sour but somewhat restrained tone. Harsh expressions such as “descendants of pirates” and “nests of criminals in the capitalist world” and the vicious phrase like “the U.S. imperialism that has been severely beaten both within

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41. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 48.

42. For historical background, characteristics, and transformation of North Korea’s unique version of socialism, see Armstrong (1998, 32-53).

43. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 825.

and without is becoming more and more rotten and will surely perish” has been dropped.<sup>44</sup> North Korea’s precaution in not unnecessarily provoking the superpower can be seen in its reevaluation of the international organizations led by the United States. In “Olympics/International Olympics Committee” item, the fierce criticism against “the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppet government” which conspired together to block North Korea to use its official name (DPRK) has been eliminated.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these signs of increased friendliness, the revised edition still abides by the golden equation endorsed by the first edition, i.e., “the United States = archetype of imperialism.” From this point of view, almost all of the U.S. heroes and organizations are subject to being imperialist tools. Douglas MacArthur was “one of the fellows who aggravated the Korea War and spent all his life in criminal battlefields after graduating from a military academy, a ringleader who mercilessly slaughtered Korean people and turned beautiful Korea into ashes.”<sup>46</sup> The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is the “notorious scheming organ of the U.S. imperialists for the oppression of people and invasion of other countries.”<sup>47</sup> Organized by the Kennedy administration, the Peace Corps is dispatched to the Third World countries under the direct control of the CIA; the young Americans “are disguised as friends of the people in the country where they visit, promoting adoration of the United States by spreading the American life style, intervening in the internal politics of other countries, and devising conspiracies to overthrow governments.”<sup>48</sup> As the very latest model of U.S. imperialist foreign policy, the revised edition sarcastically notes, Peace Corps is “advocating peace on one hand and urging war on the other hand.”<sup>49</sup>

For the purpose of boosting anti-Americanism among North Kore-

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44. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, pp. 828, 830.

45. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, p. 1255.

46. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, p. 211.

47. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 2, p. 205.

48. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 103.

49. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 206.

an readers, the revised edition also touches on the sensitive issue of racial conflicts—the Achilles tendon of American civilization. The remarkable increase of “African American problems” in the revised edition is clearly intended to ridicule America’s double standard by highlighting racial conflicts. If the 1857 judgment of the U.S. Supreme Court which denied citizenship to a Black fugitive slave named Dred Scott illuminated “the deceptiveness and antipublic features of the bourgeois U.S. Constitution,”<sup>50</sup> the 1992 riots in Los Angeles “exposed the empty rhetoric of human rights, freedom, equality, and philanthropy that the U.S. imperialists proudly advocate.”<sup>51</sup> North Korea’s conviction in highlighting racial tensions sometimes leads to ungrounded accusations: U.S. leaders mobilized the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacy terrorist group, to suppress anti-war and labor movements;<sup>52</sup> African Americans even now “do not have any political freedoms or rights . . . receive only half the pay the whites receives doing the same jobs.”<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the revised edition succeeds in damaging the moral legitimacy of the United States by disclosing unequal and imperfect human rights conditions.

The reasoning that “the U.S. President equals the mortal enemy of Korea” articulated in the first edition has been duplicated in the revised edition. Let us briefly summarize what the revised edition has compiled as the crimes of former U.S. presidents: Taft bribed poor countries with “dollar diplomacy” and manipulated the Katsura-Taft Treaty, a dirty conspiracy for Korea-Japan annexation<sup>54</sup>; Wilson “insulted the patriotic March First Movement of our people and supported the Japanese imperialists’ colonial rule over Korea”<sup>55</sup>; Truman “provoked an invasive Korea War for the purpose of taking over the entire peninsula as a colony”<sup>56</sup>; and Nixon had been preparing for

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50. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 108.

51. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 136.

52. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 268.

53. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 203.

54. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 89.

55. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 281.

56. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 92.

another Korean War by choosing the “New Asia Policy” that would encourage Asians to fight against each other to ease their own economic and military burden.<sup>57</sup> The description of the White House where these wicked U.S. presidents resided has changed from “the nest of the ringleaders of imperialism” in the first edition<sup>58</sup> to a farcical “House filled with a hundred evils” in the revised edition.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the change in nicknames, the White House has remained the original site and source of all worldwide wrongdoings.

On the other hand, it is intriguing to note that not all of the U.S. presidents are indiscriminately indicted as the commander-in-chief of the imperial campaign. Presidents who had held the office during the twenty years prior to the publication of the revised edition are lucky enough not to be victims of North Korea’s sarcastic venom. Among others, Ronald Reagan who extended cold war rhetoric to an extreme by calling the USSR an “Empire of Evil” is spared. Bushes senior and junior (the 41st and 43rd presidents) who jointly had upgraded the Cold War into the Hot War system by carrying out warfare in the Middle East are also exempted from mockery. The glaring absence of remarks or criticisms regarding these presidents is truly puzzling. This might reflect a strategic decision not to insult former U.S. presidents who could still exert influence on the current issues including humanitarian economic aid and/or the removal of North Korea from the list of nations supporting terrorism. By abstaining from negative remarks on those presidents, is North Korea sending a nuanced signal that invites the United States to the negotiation table?

As a matter of fact, when the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework in 1994, a period of appeasement and engagement seemed to begin. Nevertheless, to make a long and complex story short and simple, the Agreed Framework fell short of paving a road toward diplomatic normalization between the United States and North Korea. Due to deep-rooted mutual distrust and hos-

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57. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 81.

58. *Dictionary*, 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 988.

59. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 247.

tility, the frustrated bilateral negotiation failed to halt the so-called “nuclear standoff or blackmail.”<sup>60</sup> Written at a stage of ongoing and uncertain prospects for reconciliation between the two nations, the revised edition’s items related to the U.S. swing on an unbalanced pole between reserved prudence and crude enmity. But, the antonymic attitude inscribed in the revised edition is not a hint at all that North Korea is at a loss in the rapidly changing global order. Instead, it mirrors North Korea’s dexterous “crisis diplomacy” that keeps attacking enemies on the surface, while seeking concessions beneath.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, even after the dilution of the Cold War, the North Korean ruling class remains suspicious that the United States never abandoned its global imperialist ambition. The revised edition warns straightforwardly that the United States “conspired to resolve the capitalist crisis by fabricating a revised world system” under the sneaky title of *ilchewha* (homogeneification).<sup>62</sup> As a North Korean scholar states, “Homogeneification is a new reactionary vocabulary which was falsely invented by the United States in order to restrict the subjectivity of other nations, eliminate their own nationalities, and thus monopolize its world domination” (U. Kim 1998, 72).<sup>63</sup> In other words, North Korea regards homogeneification as nothing but diplomatic rhetoric that is designed to justify military threats with weapons of mass destruction and actual large-scale invasions worldwide. And the revised edition is horrified to discover that hidden in

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60. For details on these issues, see S. Kim (2006, 246-267).

61. Regarding North Korea’s negotiating patterns, tactics, and internal logics as exhibited during the 1990s in its deal with the United States, see Snyder (1999).

62. “Homogeneification,” literally meaning “making one and the same body,” is the North Korea’s translation for “globalization.”

63. He continues to explain that “after the polarized age between Socialism and Capitalism, a unified West is the only possible option and is an irresistible trend . . . . The critical motivation for U.S. imperialists to fabricate such a sophistry of homogeneification is thanks to the failure of Socialism and the restoration of Capitalism in Eastern Europe.” This chain of thinking sounds like a direct criticism against the U.S.-dominated neoliberal Capitalist world system, as it was advocated as the final stage of human development in Fukuyama (1992).

the cunning guise of homogeneity/globalization, U.S. military adventurism has selected North Korea—the only surviving authentic socialist nation in the world—“as the main target of invasion.”<sup>64</sup>

To evade from the impending menace of assault, North Korea must have realized that Machiavellian tactics are not just an option but the only solution for its own survival. As U.S. colonial policy and strategy have been refined,<sup>65</sup> its North Korean counterpart has to learn how to handle problems more effectively. Paraphrasing Max Weber, North Korea had to “get older and smarter to beat the old devil” (Weber 1968). After all, fair dialogue in the age of homogeneity is contingent upon both risks and rewards that the involved nations expect to receive and earn.

### **History and Politics: Where Is Kim Jung Il's Regime (not) Going?**

It may be very difficult for many experts on North Korea to suppress the temptation of guessing the fate of North Korea. Classified as a “rogue state” or “Communist dynasty,” the unique international status of North Korea urges them to treat anything associated with North Korea as a current issue requiring urgent attention. This explains why many studies on North Korea result in either rash predictions or refutations of ideological correctness. Striving to be free of such a professional obsession, I have read the first and revised edi-

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64. *Dictionary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, p. 206. The following quotation reveals what Selig Harrison calls “the siege mentality” commonly shared by most North Korean people: “The U.S. imperialists’ new world order means that the United States rises up as the emperor of the world, dominates, intervenes all matters, and forces other nations to surrender under the U.S. interests . . . the ‘two regions war front strategy’ adopted as the basic military strategy since 1993 was to prepare for executing wars in the Korea peninsula and Persian Gulf at the same time. . . . The primary target was aimed at the Korea Peninsula. That is to say, the most imminent goal of the U.S. imperialists is to destroy our regime militarily . . . because our republic is the only remaining shelter of socialism in the world” (Han 2002, 21-22).

65. Regarding the harsh criticism on the recently ungraded and shrewd U.S. imperialist policy, see Choi (1996, 57-60).

tions of *Dictionary of History* in a leisurely manner and formulated a number of following provisional conclusions that I would like share with readers.

First, the revised edition is not a partial amendment but a significant revision of the first edition in terms of North Korea's views on history and the world. Partially discarding its earlier policy of isolation and aggression, North Korean authorities have made efforts to keep pace with the new global world system. The fact that world history items doubled while Korean history items decreased in the revised edition verifies this new inclination. Once having secluded itself behind the shield of Juche ideology of Kim Il Sung, North Korea nowadays responds to the disturbing trumpet call of globalization. If the first edition was a militant manual with which Kim Il Sung had urged his people to march forward in the age of Cold War, the revised edition is a guidebook with which "the world's first postmodern dictator"<sup>66</sup> Kim Jung Il escorts North Korean people to overcome a new challenge of homogeneification. So, the Kim Il Sung catechisms which had abounded in the first edition have disappeared and were replaced by those of Kim Jung Il in the revised edition.

Second, as the protagonists of the dictionaries changed, so did their tone and ideological color. Whereas the first edition epitomized the black and white mentality of the Cold War era, the revised edition seems to be a compromised hybrid between two opposing forces within the North Korean power elite. In other words, it was a negotiated outcome between reformers (party of movement) who proposed to execute a North Korean version of Glasnost and Perestroika and conservatives (party of status quo) who were anxious to turn North Korean society back to Marxism-Leninism and Juche ideology. The unstable coexistence of contradictory dualities between lingering nostalgia for anachronistic Marxism-Leninism and assertive Korea-centric Juche ideology and between a deep-rooted grudge against the United States and secretive overtures to Uncle Sam behind closed doors por-

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66. I borrow this colorful nickname given to Kim Jung Il from the subtitle of Chapter 5 of Cumings (2004).

trays the dilemma of (not) choosing a specific path. In this sense, the revised edition is a transitional work where the death-knell of an ancien régime and the birth certificate of an emerging new order are roughly intermingled.

Third, a more fundamental dilemma for the North Korean ruling class may derive from the realization that they do not have a viable choice between reform and status quo. Unless they completely negate the very *raison d'être* of the state (Juche ideology = the sacred cornerstone of the regime), a train bound for Glasnost and Perestroika will never depart. Unlike its fellow Asian nations such as China and Vietnam which are not afraid to import and experiment with a capitalistic market system, North Korea envies the other half-brother who is rich and liberal. If North Korea shakes hands with market capitalism out of the inevitable necessity of supplying decent food to its starving people, the ordinary people of North Korea could misinterpret it as a total submission to South Korea's system (Cumings 2004, 184-185; Lankov 2007, 308). Judging from this point of view, if the first edition addressed an existential question of "to be or not to be" in the age of Cold War, the revised one raises a different pragmatic question of "to change or to be forced to change" in the post-Communist era.

Fourth, the revised edition confirms a conventional maxim that the "history book has to be rewritten as the author of power changes." Rewriting history is surely an act of faith, as historical fact and narration are constantly recreated to inculcate the infallibility of the ruler and to reinforce nation rebuilding. In the case of the revised edition, the erasure, insertion, modification, and convergence of certain items and related contents are choreographed according to seductive rhythms that suggest a rectified past would guarantee a better future. In order to accommodate radically changed circumstances and to facilitate the coming of a desired future, the strict boundaries that the first edition drew between you and I, enemy and friend, science and utopia, and capitalism and socialism have "melted into air" in the revised edition. If friends of yesterday (the USSR) betray me and if I have to cohabitate hazardously with the enemies of yesterday (the United States), the past, no matter how glorious it had been, should be

retextualized and reinvented at all costs.

The last thought that has crossed my mind is a somewhat cynical one. Let both the first and revised editions of *Dictionary of History* be designated as a cultural treasure of the world! The dictionaries indeed serve as an amazing testimony to how the “extreme twentieth century” (in Eric Hobsbawm’s term) has carved an everlasting scar on the face of one nation in the Far East. The old and new *Dictionary of History* have chronicled how bravely and desperately North Korea “with arms in one hand and a hammer and sickle in the other” has struggled for its own survival throughout the age of bloody civil/cold war and the horrible age of Pax Americana (or rather that of homogeneity). Full of tragic, comic, absurd, farcical, and adventurous stories, the two editions of *Dictionary of History* are really one of the most the unique historiographies ever produced. As often said, if “local is global,” they deserve being dedicated to the Museum of World History, so that people could learn priceless lessons of how vain as well as important (re)writing history is.

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## GLOSSARY

<i>gyeongje gwalli gaeseon jochi</i>	經濟管理改善措置
<i>ilchehwa</i>	一體化
<i>joseon minjok jeiljuui</i>	朝鮮民族第一主義
<i>Ryeoksa sajeon</i>	歷史事典